

**Gilles Street Primary Presentation – Greg Cousins and Helen Grant**  
**Discover 2010 Local Government Showcase and General Meeting 22 – 23 April**

Gilles St Primary is a city school with over 300 students. It is a diverse community with children from around the world and across Adelaide. There are over 40 different cultural backgrounds with students from every continent.

Gilles St has 2 components, mainstream classes and the New Arrivals Program, which is an intensive language course for students newly arrived in Australia.

Gilles St has a history of award winning filmmaking. In 2008 '*Language Opens Doors*' was chosen as a winning entry in the Los Angeles 'My Hero' Short Film Festival.

In February 2009 Gilles St successfully applied for a Civics and Citizenship grant through the Civics and Citizenship Partnership Project. The purpose of these grants was to support schools to foster and document good practice in Civics and Citizenship Education.

Our project focused on two things

1. Running a whole school election, using the preferential voting system, to elect representatives for the Student Representative Council.
2. The production of a film that documented the Election Day and the process leading up to it.

Through this work we aimed to

- Increase student engagement with Civics and Citizenship education
- Develop student understanding of election processes and the concept of representation
- Strengthen the SRC process in the school
- Increase teacher understanding of the Civics and Citizenship Education program and resources
- Engage parents and the wider school community in the Civics and Citizenship Education program

Our plan involved 5 key groups

1. Year 6/7 students
2. The Student Representative Council
3. The Gilles St Primary School student body
4. Classroom teachers
5. The Australian Electoral Commission

Year 6/7 students undertook an Inquiry based unit, which began with simple questions such as “What is Democracy?” and “What do you know about parliament?” Students explored topics such as the Magna Carta, Federation and Australian Prime Ministers. It included visits to the Law Courts and participation in a mock parliament.

These students participated in the 3-tier program offered by the AEC. This involved AEC educators speaking to the students at school and visits to the Electoral Education Centre and State Parliament. The AEC Democracy Rules package was the main teaching resource used in the project.

The year 6/7 students then played a major role in the education of younger students, the organization and running of the election, and the documentary film making process.

Middle primary students participated in decision making activities, explored the idea of compulsory voting and experienced a small hypothetical election to prepare them.

Junior primary students were introduced to the concept of a student representative body and participation as a member of a group. They also experienced a small hypothetical election to prepare them.

The Student Representative Council identified current methods used in the school for selecting SRC representatives and communicated aspects of the project to their fellow students through class meetings.

The Behind the News Team was invited to film the election and announcement of the results at assembly the next day. The BTN story was aired on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was titled ‘*Democratic Elections*’ and compared the Gilles St Primary elections to the disputed election in Iran.

The film, transcripts, teacher activity sheets, student responses and further Web Extra footage can be found on the BTN website  
[www.abc.net.au/news/btn/story/s2600931.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/news/btn/story/s2600931.htm)

Or

Google: Behind The News > Archives > 2009: Episode17, 23 June > Democratic Elections

After the election students revisited their initial questions and reflected on the whole process.

The final stage of this part of the project involved year 6/7 students taking action by writing letters to local federal member Kate Ellis, regarding the closure of the Electoral Education Centre.

Following the election the film '*Kissing Babies and Pressing the flesh*' was scripted and filmed. Many of the ideas in *Kissing Babies and Pressing the Flesh* were drawn from student experiences. A portion of the grant money that we received, combined with funding from the school's media and student voice budgets, allowed us to employ filmmaker Andy Petrushevics (a parent at the school) to produce the film.

This film has become a major resource in the SRC election process. It looks at why people nominate for the SRC, what the SRC does and what students should think about when electing their representatives. It is also an excellent way of showing parents what the SRC process involves.

'*Kissing Babies and Pressing The Flesh*' and the '*BTN Democratic Elections*' films will be used extensively in the lead up to the whole school election that we have planned for later this term. The election will involve a group of students who trained as electoral officers in 2009, working with a new group of students who will receive training this term. Preparatory election workshops will be available to all classes and the AEC will provide election resources such as the booths, ballot boxes and ballot papers.

Civics and citizenship education promotes students' participation in Australia's democracy by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions of active and informed citizenship. It entails knowledge and understanding of Australia's democratic heritage and traditions, its political and legal institutions and the shared values of freedom, tolerance, respect, responsibility and inclusion.

<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/cce>

One of the key findings to come out of the National Assessment Program of Civics and Citizenship conducted in 2007 was that student participation in school governance activities has a significant and cumulative effect on student achievement and understanding in Civics and Citizenship Education.

At Gilles Street Student participation in the SRC/Student Voice program is integral to Civics and Citizenship education. The annual whole school election is one example of this in action.